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Report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System

General Assembly
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[Original: English]

[18 July 1997]

REPORT OF THE OPEN-ENDED HIGH-LEVEL WORKING GROUP ON THE STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

1. In its decision 50/491 of 16 September 1996, the General Assembly, having considered the report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations system,[1] established pursuant to Assembly resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, took note of the report of the Working Group and decided that the latter should continue its work on the basis of the mandate contained in resolution 49/252 and, taking into account views expressed by Member States, submit a report to the Assembly at its fifty-first session.[2]

2. During the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, the Working Group held 1 organizational meeting and 35 substantive meetings from 23 October 1996 to 10 July 1997.

3. At its organizational meeting, on 23 October 1996, chaired by Mr. Ismail Razali, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session, the Working Group elected Mr. Prakash Shah (India) and Mr. Hans Jacob Bjørn Lian (Norway) Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group.

4. At its 1st substantive meeting, on 23 January 1997, also chaired by the President of the General Assembly, the Working Group heard the latter's statement. Acting on the recommendation of the President of the General Assembly based upon Economic and Social Council decision 1996/297 of 25 July 1996 and following his consultations with Member States and the Bureau of the Working Group as well as a report on informal soundings by Mr. Ahmad Kamal (Pakistan) on the subject, the Working Group decided to establish a Sub-group on Non-Governmental Organizations.

5. At the same meeting, the Working Group elected Ambassador Ahmad Kamal Chairman of the Sub-group on Non-governmental Organizations. The Working Group was informed that the Sub-group, after holding 10 formal meetings, had not been able to achieve a consensus on the question of its mandate. The Working Group emphasizes the importance of early examination of the question of the participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1996/297 and the interpretive statement made on that occasion by the President of the Council. In that context, the Working Group recommends that the General Assembly give early consideration at its fifty-second session to the manner in which the matter is to be pursued further.

6. Acting in accordance with paragraph 17 of its report to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session,[1] which had been approved by the Assembly, the Working Group resumed its substantive discussions on the basis of annex II to that report (WGUNS/CRP.12), which covered two specific areas, the General Assembly and the Secretariat, while keeping open the question of taking up other additional subjects under "Other matters".

7. In that connection, at its 1st meeting, on 23 January 1997, the Working Group considered and approved the programme of work for its first substantive session in 1997 prepared by the Vice-Chairmen (WGUNS/CRP.13). Based on the

proposal of the Vice-Chairmen, the discussions in the Working Group proceeded section by section and paragraph by paragraph within each section of document WGUNS/CRP.12 with respect to those sections and paragraphs that were not underlined.

8. With regard to the underlined portions of the document, the Working Group followed the proposal of the Vice-Chairmen and heard and discussed further comments. On the basis of these comments, the Vice-Chairmen made specific proposals in pursuance of the tasks which had been referred to the Working Group by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996.

9. At the conclusion of the first set of substantive discussions, the Working Group decided to inform the Secretary-General of its progress to date, since many of the issues under consideration by the Working Group, particularly those concerning the Secretariat, were directly relevant to questions that the Secretary-General might well be addressing in his reform plans. On 10 March 1997, the President of the General Assembly, in his capacity as Chairman of the Working Group, sent to the Secretary-General a letter and memorandum presenting an overview of the deliberations of the Working Group on ways to strengthen the Secretariat (see annex I to the present report). In addition, on behalf of the Working Group, the Vice-Chairmen met with the Secretary-General to discuss these matters.

10. Throughout its sessions during the year, the Working Group also considered non-papers submitted by delegations and the Vice-Chairmen on matters under discussion. In addition, the Working Group had before it relevant information provided by the Secretariat in response to queries from delegations regarding issues raised in the course of its work.

11. At its second substantive session, from 24 to 28 February 1997, the Working Group held seven meetings, at which it continued the drafting of its working document. The Group had before it a conference room paper prepared by the Vice-Chairmen (WGUNS/CRP.14), which contained an updated and revised version of document WGUNS/CRP.12 based on the discussions at the previous session and taking into account proposals and ideas presented by various delegations. The non-underlined sections of the paper represented elements on which there was a convergence of views and a growing consensus. Section 13 of the document, on non-governmental organizations and civil society, had been retained pending recommendations of the Sub-group on Non-Governmental Organizations.

12. At the 7th meeting, on 24 February 1997, the Secretary-General made a statement to the Working Group in which he described measures he had already taken within the Secretariat towards strengthening that organ of the United Nations system and presented his vision of a two-track reform process which he was undertaking. Those reform measures were a reflection of the Secretary-General's more detailed plan for strengthening the United Nations system, which he later described in his letter dated 17 March 1997 addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/51/829). The Secretary-General also answered questions from delegations. A summary of the introductory remarks made by the Secretary-General is contained in annex II to the present report.

13. At its third substantive session, from 12 to 23 May 1997, the Working Group held 11 meetings, at which it continued its negotiations and the elaboration of its working document on the basis of the text in document WGUNS/CRP.15, prepared by the Vice-Chairmen, which was a revised and updated version of document

WGUNS/CRP.14, incorporating ideas and proposals of delegations expressed at the previous session. The paper also reflected the progress made by the Working Group in broadening the areas of convergence of views and consensus.

14. At its fourth substantive session, on 9 and 10 July 1997, the Working Group held 11 meetings, at which it continued its efforts to elaborate an agreed text. The Group had before it a revised and updated version of document WGUNS/CRP.15 prepared by the Vice-Chairmen on the basis of ideas and proposals of delegations submitted at the third session (WGUNS/CRP.16). With its consideration of that document the Working Group concluded its discussions. Among the items discussed by the Working Group on which consensus was not reached within the time available were the following: the use of personnel on loan; the question of establishing a post of Deputy-Secretary-General; public information; the role and working methods of the Committee for Programme and Coordination; certain additional innovative mechanisms in the General Assembly; and the use of the veto in the selection of the Secretary-General. The Working Group had before it the draft report prepared by the Vice-Chairmen, reflecting the progress made by the Group to date in carrying out its mandate. The Working Group decided to inform the Secretary-General, through its Chairman and its Vice-Chairmen, of the progress it had made before he delivered his statement on reform of the United Nations which was scheduled for July 1997.

15. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the General Assembly adopt the following draft resolution:

Strengthening of the United Nations system

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, by which it established the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System,

Recalling in particular paragraph 2 of resolution 49/252,

Taking note of the report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System,

1. Adopts the text contained in the annex to the present resolution for implementation effective from 1 January 1998;

2. Calls upon the relevant intergovernmental bodies to implement fully the measures specified in the text to strengthen the work of the United Nations system, in particular of the General Assembly and the Secretariat;

3. Requests the Secretary-General, as part of his ongoing efforts to improve the functioning of the Organization, to implement fully those measures in the text that are within his competence;

4. Also requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session on the implementation of the present resolution;

5. Invites other principal organs, specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system to implement the measures for strengthening the system that are specified in the text and that are within their respective areas of competence, as appropriate;

6. Decides that the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has completed its work as mandated in resolution 49/252.

ANNEX

I. PURPOSE

1. The Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has undertaken its work in accordance with the perspective that its mandate for strengthening the United Nations system, derived from General Assembly resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, is in order better to enable the Organization to fulfil the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to meet the aspirations of its members. It has focused on improving the capacity of the General Assembly to discharge effectively its functions, role and powers and of the Secretariat to carry out effectively and efficiently the mandates of intergovernmental processes with the necessary transparency and accountability.

2. The Working Group has proceeded on the assumption that adequate resources will be provided to support the United Nations system. It has not seen its mandate as responding to the current financial crisis, which is being considered by the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations. It has also proceeded on the assumption that any Secretariat resources that are freed up as a result of strengthening measures proposed by the Working Group shall be reallocated according to priorities set by the General Assembly, particularly to the economic and social areas.

II. REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

3. The report of the Secretary-General should be available not later than thirty days prior to the opening of the regular session of the General Assembly in all official languages of the organization so as to permit due consideration.

4. The introduction to the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization should be in the nature of an executive summary highlighting the main issues.

5. The main body of the report shall be comprehensive, informative and analytical in a way that will allow Member States to examine and assess, inter alia, through its debate the extent to which mandates given by the General Assembly have been fulfilled, as well as for priority setting by Member States in the context of major political, economic and social, administrative and financial issues on its agenda.

6. The Secretary-General shall incorporate a new forward-looking section in his report on the work of the Organization. It shall describe the specific goals for the Secretariat in the year ahead in the context of the work plan for the Organization in the coming year, taking into account the medium-term plan and that the responsibility for establishing priorities rests with the Member States.

7. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization shall be considered in plenary meetings immediately after the general debate. The

President of the General Assembly should assess the debate on this item. In the light of that assessment, informal consultations shall be held, under the chairmanship of the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly, to discuss the action that may be required by the Assembly on the basis of the debate on the report.

8. The General Assembly in plenary meeting may refer sections of the report for more detailed consideration by the Main Committees.

9. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization shall, inter alia, contain an analytical and concise annex elaborating the costs by major programmes and activities of all bodies of the United Nations system, located both in and outside New York, according to their mandates, so as to improve Member States' overview of system-wide issues.

10. The Secretary-General is requested to introduce orally the report at an appropriate time under the agenda item entitled "Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization".

III. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

11. The item entitled "Report of the Security Council" shall continue to be considered in plenary meetings.

12. The President of the General Assembly shall assess the debate on this item and consider the need for further consideration of the report of the Security Council. In the light of that assessment informal consultations shall be held, after the debate in plenary meetings, under the chairmanship of the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, to discuss the need and content of any action by the Assembly based on the debate.

13. The item shall not be closed but shall remain open to enable further discussion as necessary during the year, bearing in mind, inter alia, additional reports as and when necessary.

14. The monthly forecast of the programme of work of the Security Council shall be circulated for the information of the General Assembly.

IV. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT FROM THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

15. The report of the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly shall be in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996. The report shall also contain an evaluation of the report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, taking into account the report from the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

V. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

16. The report of the International Court of Justice shall continue to be considered in plenary meetings. The General Assembly shall continue to support the role of the International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ

of the Organization, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Assembly shall also continue to encourage the progressive development and codification of international law.

VI. TIMING OF THE PLENARY MEETINGS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

17. The plenary meetings of the General Assembly shall be formally opened on the first Tuesday following 1 September, with the election of the President, Vice-Presidents and Chairmen of Main Committees (the General Committee). The General Committee shall then meet as soon as possible after its election and shall present its report to the General Assembly before the commencement of the general debate.

18. The plenary meetings of the General Assembly shall reconvene in mid-September to consider the report of the General Committee.

VII. THE GENERAL DEBATE

19. There shall continue to be only one general debate each year, beginning in the third week of September.

20. The preparation of the list of speakers for the general debate shall be based on the following principles:

(a) The general debate shall be organized over a period of two weeks so as to maximize possibilities for interministerial contacts;

(b) Member States shall be invited to indicate three preferences for speaking times;

(c) Member States wishing to organize and participate in group meetings during the general debate period shall be encouraged to coordinate their responses to the request for preferences and to indicate this transparently in their response;

(d) The Secretariat shall be requested to prepare a list of speakers based on existing traditions and expressions of preferences to best accommodate Members' needs;

(e) The list of speakers for each day shall be completed and no speakers will be rolled over to the next day notwithstanding the implications for hours of work.

VIII. TIME LIMITS

21. There shall be no time limits or specified themes for the general debate but the General Assembly will indicate a voluntary guideline of up to twenty minutes for each statement.

22. Outside the general debate there shall be a fifteen-minute time limit in plenary meetings and in the Main Committees.

IX. THE AGENDA

23. Bearing in mind rule 81 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the requirements for reopening an agenda item which the General Assembly had decided was completed will continue to be as at present and should be made clear to delegations through a statement from the President of the General Assembly. A delegation wishing to reopen an agenda item should send a written request to the President of the General Assembly. The President will then undertake soundings to ascertain whether the request enjoys wide support. In the light of these soundings, the President shall announce in the Journal of the United Nations the date of the meeting of the General Assembly to consider the question of reopening the item bearing in mind the requirements of rule 81.

24. The General Assembly shall take further steps to rationalize and streamline the agenda based on the Guidelines on the Rationalization of the agenda of the General Assembly agreed to by the Assembly in annex I to its resolution 48/264 of 29 July 1994, and in particular shall make greater use of clustering, biennialization or triennialization of agenda items. Items that could be considered at a later session shall be identified, taking into account the priorities set by the medium-term plan.

25. As a general rule agenda items that could be considered in the Main Committees shall be referred to the Main Committees rather than the General Assembly in plenary meetings.

26. The Main Committees shall give specific attention to rationalizing their future agenda and consider recommending any possible clustering, biennialization or triennialization of items.

X. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

27. The General Assembly is the highest political body with universal membership of the Organization. Consideration of items directly in plenary meetings shall be reserved for urgent issues or issues of major political importance, bearing in mind paragraphs 1 and 2 of annex I to General Assembly resolution 48/264.

28. The President of the General Assembly, with a view to ensuring that there is a systematic and transparent process for participation by delegations in discussions on action to be taken on items considered directly in plenary meetings, shall assess the debate in plenary meetings and, where appropriate, organize open-ended informal consultations under the chairmanship of the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly to discuss the need for and content of any action.

29. The Secretariat shall ensure, in consultation with the President, that priority is accorded to the availability of a meeting room and services to facilitate these consultations.

30. All Main Committees shall hold brief organizational sessions once the General Assembly has taken decisions on the Agenda, before the commencement of the general debate. Bureaux of the Main Committees shall meet earlier to draw up recommendations on organization and programme of work.

31. The Main Committees shall meet in substantive session only after the end of the general debate.

32. The number of reports requested shall be rationalized where possible so as to permit more focused consideration of issues. All bodies shall exercise restraint in making proposals containing requests for new reports, bearing in mind paragraphs 6 and 7 of General Assembly resolution 50/206 C of 23 December 1995, and should consider integrating, biennializing or triennializing the presentation of reports.

XI. THE GENERAL COMMITTEE

33. The General Committee shall use its authority and competence, taking into account rule 43 of the rules of procedure, allowing Member States that are not represented on the Committee to participate in the discussions of the General Committee. The process of decision-making will continue to be as at present.

34. The General Committee may, each year prior to the closure of the session, prepare suggestions based on its experience for the consideration of the incoming General Committee.

35. The General Committee is requested to consider and recommend to the General Assembly methods and procedures for streamlining and rationalizing the Committee's work. The General Committee shall, in this context, in relation to each agenda item proposed, consider its rejection or its inclusion in the provisional agenda, taking into account previous recommendations of the General Committee and previous relevant decisions of the General Assembly.

XII. SUBORDINATE MACHINERY

36. The First Committee and the Fourth Committee shall not meet simultaneously and may consider meeting in a sequential manner during the regular session of the General Assembly. This arrangement shall not apply if it affects their respective identities, programmes of work and effective consideration of their agendas.

37. The Disarmament Commission should continue to consider ways to organize its work better, including rationalizing the duration of its sessions.

38. The General Assembly should invite the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization to consider the functions and role of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and to submit a recommendation to the Assembly at its fifty-third session. Meanwhile, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation should be asked to submit its report to the International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organization as well as the General Assembly. The General Assembly would discuss the report along with any International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organization evaluation of the report.

39. The Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly for the Mid-term Review of the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s shall conduct its final review and appraisal during at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

XIII. THE BUDGET PROCESS AND FULFILMENT OF MANDATES

40. To ensure better transparency and accountability the medium-term plan shall be the framework for the budget process.

41. The budget process shall be carried out in accordance with relevant General Assembly budget resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, and financial regulations and rules. The importance of continuous and appropriate dialogue on the improvement of current administrative and budgetary practices and procedures is recognized.

42. The Secretary-General shall continue to have flexibility without prejudice to the fulfilment of mandates, to redeploy, as necessary, within the limits prescribed by the General Assembly budget resolutions and financial regulations and rules, the human and financial resources necessary to fulfil mandates.

XIV. ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

43. The President of the General Assembly shall be encouraged to take appropriate opportunities to utilize the potential of the Office of the President, consistent with the Charter and the mandates of the General Assembly, to advance the purposes and principles of the Organization, including regular consultations between the President of the General Assembly and the presidents of other organs, particularly the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

44. In order to assist the President in the discharge of his responsibilities, the General Assembly shall request the Secretary-General, after consultation with the President, to include in the next programme budget a proposal for adequate resources to be made available to the President, including, if necessary, through enhanced administrative and personnel support in the Office of the President.

XV. TECHNOLOGY

45. The Secretary-General is requested to pursue an information technology plan with a range of options for providing all permanent missions to the United Nations and the wider public on-line access to documents and appropriate United Nations information. Unless the General Assembly decides otherwise, hard copies of documents shall continue to be distributed to permanent missions in accordance with their needs. While welcoming the progress made by the Ad hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council, further efforts in this direction could be pursued within a specified time-frame to harmonize and improve United Nations information systems. All countries, in particular developing countries, shall be assisted in making full use of this potential access. Adequate provision should be made for training delegates. Facility for such access by delegations within the United Nations premises shall also be expanded as far as possible. Availability of information in this manner would need to be ensured in all official languages of the United Nations.

46. The Secretary-General is encouraged to include information on the impact of technological improvements in his report on the implementation of mandates, by means of comparing outputs with objectives.

XVI. SYSTEM WIDE COORDINATION

47. The Secretary-General is requested to elaborate further ways to strengthen system-wide coordination and to report thereon to the General Assembly.

XVII. OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE SECRETARIAT: EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS

48. The Secretariat shall be held strictly accountable for implementing mandates within allocated budgets.

49. For the Secretariat to operate efficiently in fulfilling mandates, micromanagement of the Secretariat by the General Assembly should be avoided.

50. The Secretary-General is encouraged to submit proposals to the General Assembly to improve the presentation of the programme performance report so as to enable the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Main Committees of the General Assembly, without prejudice to the provisions of section 6 of resolution 45/248 B of 21 December 1990, as reaffirmed in resolution 51/221 of 18 December 1996, to consider the portions of the report related to their substantive work with reference to the medium-term plan with a view to facilitating the consideration of the programme performance report by the Fifth Committee.

51. There shall be more detailed and structured examination in the Main Committees of the relevant reports of the Board of Auditors, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Office of Internal Oversight Services in relation to the substantive work of these committees.

52. Accountability and intergovernmental oversight shall be improved by periodic coordination meetings between the Board of Auditors, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Joint Inspection Unit with appropriate input from the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

53. Question time opportunities in all Main Committees would enable a dynamic and candid interchange with responsible Secretariat officials to facilitate the Main Committees in their assessment of fulfilment of mandates, productivity and related issues.

54. Every effort should be made to ensure that the measures referred to above take into account and are mutually reinforcing of the programme evaluation activities carried out by other competent intergovernmental bodies.

XVIII. AREAS FOR MORE INTENSIVE WORK BY OVERSIGHT MACHINERY

55. The relevant bodies should request the external and internal oversight machinery to give early attention to, among others, the following areas and report thereon periodically to the General Assembly:

(a) Practice and procedures in employment of consultants;

(b) Practice and procedures in short-term contract employment;

(c) Practice and procedures with respect to recruitment;

(d) Productivity gains actually achieved from investment and technology and the impact of the postponement/deferral of upgrading technological systems on the long-term functioning of the Organization;

(e) Practice and procedures for appointments at the senior level;

(f) Practice and procedures for procurement and the award of contracts;

(g) An evaluation of conflict of interest issues, in particular for personnel dealing with employment decisions and award of procurement and contracts;

(h) Practice and procedures on the establishment and use of trust funds;

(i) Practice and procedures with regard to personnel on loan;

(j) Any other issue recommended by the General Assembly.

XIX. THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

56. The process of selection of the Secretary-General shall be made more transparent.

57. The General Assembly shall make full use of the power of appointment enshrined in the Charter in the process of the appointment of the Secretary-General and the agenda item entitled "Appointment of the Secretary-General".

58. The duration of the term or terms of appointment, including the option of a single term, shall be considered before the appointment of the next Secretary-General.

59. In the course of the identification and appointment of the best candidate for the post, due regard shall continue to be given to regional rotation and shall also be given to gender equality in the appointment of the Secretary-General.

60. Without prejudice to the prerogatives of the Security Council, the President of the General Assembly may consult with Member States to identify potential candidates endorsed by a Member State and, upon informing all Member States of the results, may forward those results to the Security Council.

61. In order to ensure a smooth and efficient transition, the Secretary-General should be appointed as early as possible, preferably no later than one month before the date on which the term of the incumbent expires.

XX. SENIOR MANAGEMENT

62. The senior management structure should be considered in the context of the overall structure of the Organization, desired lines of authority and decision-making.

63. The Organization shall have a clear pyramidal structure. To that end, the functions and number of Under-Secretaries-General, Special Representatives of the Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General should be reviewed by

the Secretary-General and streamlined, and lines of authority and decision-making made transparent.

64. Member States note the Secretary-General's decision to establish a Policy Coordination Group as a means to enhance coordination in the terms explained by him to Member States.

65. The principles of equitable geographical distribution and gender balance shall be reflected in appointments to senior positions, including heads of programmes, funds and other United Nations bodies.

66. The principle enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/232 of 2 March 1992 that there should be no monopoly on senior posts by nationals of any State or group of States should be strictly observed and implemented. The Secretary-General should keep the General Assembly regularly informed of his/her actions on those matters.

67. The Secretary-General is encouraged to consider uniform terms and term limits in his appointments to senior management posts.

XXI. HEADS OF PROGRAMMES, FUNDS AND OTHER UNITED NATIONS BODIES

68. Affirming the role of the General Assembly in approving appointments and extension of terms, uniform terms of office of four years, renewable once should be introduced for the executive heads of programmes, funds and other bodies of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

69. The specialized agencies are also encouraged to consider uniform terms and term limits for their executive heads.

XXII. GENERAL STAFFING ISSUES

70. It is essential for the successful functioning of the Organization that it has a career international civil service for its core functions. There is also an important role for term contracts for various categories of staff.

71. The Secretary-General shall be encouraged, in accordance with legislative mandates, to ensure a judicious mix of contract and tenure appointments so as to have an appropriate balance between institutional memory, long-term commitment and independence and the ability to bring in fresh insights and expertise, and to dismiss non-performing staff.

72. Short-term appointments should not be used as an entry to career positions. A review should be undertaken of staff on short-term appointments.

73. Staff development and training shall be encouraged along with a cost-effective common training system to be developed for the Secretariat and funds and programmes;

74. The Charter provisions giving due regard to the importance of recruiting staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible shall be implemented. In this regard, the principle of gender balance shall be observed within the Organization. In achieving gender balance, the principle of equitable geographical distribution shall be respected.

75. The quality of the language services shall be enhanced, including through the provision of effective management practices, bearing in mind that all official languages of the United Nations are of equal importance in this regard.

XXIII. PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

76. The system of in-career promotion shall be made more transparent.

77. A planned rotation among different departments as well as between Headquarters and the field level, as appropriate, as decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/222 A of 23 December 1994, as one way of enhancing experience and skills, should be developed and submitted to the General Assembly.

78. The performance appraisal system shall be subject to periodic review and audit and comparative statistics should be maintained for review by the General Assembly.

XXIV. SECRETARIAT REMUNERATION

79. The General Assembly shall request the International Civil Service Commission to prepare proposals for a possible system of performance-based remuneration for its consideration.

80. The General Assembly shall reiterate that topping up of remuneration of their nationals in any way by Member States is not acceptable and shall request the Secretary-General to report on the matter.

XXV. INDEPENDENCE OF THE SECRETARIAT

81. Further efforts shall be made, consistent with Article 101 of the Charter to pay due regard to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

82. Compliance with Article 100 (2) of the Charter is of fundamental importance and it would be timely to call upon Member States scrupulously to observe Article 100 (2) and request the Secretary-General to prepare guidelines on what constitutes acceptable representations to him and his staff on appointments.

83. Consistent with Article 101 of the Charter, Secretariat guidelines for staff members on financial interests shall include a requirement at all levels of senior management for specified financial disclosures at the time of appointment and on a regular basis. These financial statements shall be dealt with on a basis of confidentiality.

* * *

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 24 (A/50/24).

[2] For the background to the establishment of the Working Group and its activities in 1995 and 1996, see Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 24 (A/50/24).

ANNEX I

Letter dated 10 March 1997 from the President of the General Assembly addressed to the Secretary-General

During the discussions of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System at its last meeting, there was a feeling that I should provide you with an overview of the deliberations on questions that might be relevant to decisions that you may be making in the first quarter concerning the reform and restructuring of the Secretariat.

Accordingly, enclosed is an overview, prepared by the Vice-Chairmen, Mr. Prakash Shah (India) and Mr. Hans Jacob Bjørn Lian (Norway).[a] As indicated therein, while there is no agreement on all issues regarding matters pertaining to the Secretariat, and agreement has yet to be reached on the exact language on various issues, there is a convergence of views on several elements.

The members have noted your desire to dovetail the Secretariat reform with the ongoing work in the Working Group and they hope that the essence of the deliberations so far, captured in the overview, will be useful in the initiatives and decisions on Secretariat reforms which you propose to take during the first quarter of 1997.

(Signed) RAZALI Ismail

Notes

[a] Not reproduced in the present document.

ANNEX II

Summary of introductory remarks made by the Secretary-General at the meeting of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, held on 24 February 1997

1. The Secretary-General expressed his pleasure at appearing before the Working Group and beginning a dialogue on the reform process. He indicated he hoped to engage in similar dialogues with the other working groups of the General Assembly active in the area of reform.

Spirit of partnership

2. The Secretary-General stated that he had committed himself to "taking personal responsibility within the Secretariat in leading the reform process particularly in those areas within [his] direct authority but also from a system-wide perspective on the basis of the responsibilities inherent in [hi office". He stressed that the process he was leading would be conducted in spirit of partnership between the Secretariat and Member States about which President of the General Assembly had spoken, and should fully dovetail with intergovernmental processes on reform which had been put in place by the Gen Assembly. For that purpose he had established a close working relationship the President of the General Assembly.

Two-track reform process

3. The Secretary-General indicated that he had established a two-track ref process. The first track involved those managerial initiatives and decision falling within his authority that could be taken within the first quarter of this year. The second track involved the preparation of a programme of refo which would incorporate: (a) those further measures within his authority including those which he believed would benefit from consultations with and guidance from Member States; and (b) his proposals/recommendations in respec the more fundamental issues which could only be decided by Governments. Thi track would culminate in a report which he would submit in July 1997.

Structure for reform

4. The Secretary-General indicated that he had established a structure for reform in order to support his initiatives. The main elements were the following:

(a) The appointment of Mr. Maurice F. Strong as the Executive Coordina for United Nations Reform;

(b) He referred to the establishment of his Policy Coordination Group, composed of the heads of the departments and offices of the Secretariat including the Heads of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund. To compleme the Policy Coordination Group, four Executive Committees had been set up in sectoral areas of peace and security, humanitarian affairs, economic and soc affairs, and development operations, each with its own designated convenor. Although the main functions of the Policy Coordination Group and Executive Committees were to deal with ongoing policy, managerial and operational issu

they would also be utilized to contribute to the reform process within their areas of competence;

(c) Mr. Strong would chair a Steering Committee on United Nations Reform whose membership would include a number of senior officials representing the span of activities of the Organization, including the convenors of the Executive Committees. The Steering Committee would be a principal vehicle for monitoring and coordinating the reform process within the Secretariat and for ensuring participation and involvement of all relevant United Nations departments, funds and programmes in support of the Executive Coordinator for Reform;[a]

(d) A Management Reform Group, focusing on furthering management reform measures cutting across the Secretariat, would be established within the Department of Administration and Management, and would be complemented by reform groups to be established in each department, fund and programme, to assist in pursuing internal reform reviews in each United Nations entity. The arrangement in the Department for Administration and Management would replace the Efficiency Board and its working group. These groups would constitute a network upon which the other reform mechanisms, particularly the Steering Committee, could draw.

5. The Secretary-General pointed out that the overall aim in the establishment of those mechanisms was to involve, on a continuing basis, all Secretariat entities in the United Nations in the challenge presented by reform while organizing and accelerating the reform process through the identification of a clear locus of action. His reforms would build on a substantial body of knowledge already existing in the form of various analyses and studies prepared by independent commissions and bodies and Governments. He would take careful account of the work already accomplished by the various General Assembly reform working groups.

Transparency

6. In conclusion, the Secretary-General stressed that he was keen to ensure transparency in the reform process, which should not be "a closed and mysterious one". He committed himself and his senior colleagues to reach out to seek views, receive inputs and exchange ideas about how best to proceed.

Notes

[a] Mr. Maurice F. Strong, Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform (Chairman).
Mr. James G. Speth, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme.
Mr. Joseph E. Connor, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Administration and Management.
Mr. Marrack Goulding, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Political Affairs.
Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.
Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Humanitarian Affairs.
Mr. Hans Corell, Legal Counsel.
Mrs. Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
Mr. Gert Rosenthal, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.